[p. 32]

II

THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND

THE FAMILY AND THE LINEAGE

592 A CHILD born into this community has for the most intimate companions of his babyhood the inmates of the hut in which
●612 he lives. These will be, normally, his mother, his father, and his full brothers and sisters, that is to say, his immediate 'family' in our sense of the word, with, possibly, the addition of a grandparent. Indeed, taking it by and large, the child's relations to those persons who constitute what may be called the kindred, i.e. his two parents and the near relatives of both of them, do not, in practice, differ very widely from those of our own children, except that his mother's brother possesses authority denied to our maternal uncles, and his mother's sister stands closer to him than any but the most devoted of our aunts. But there is no word in his dialect for this group of people, nor is this 'kindred' recognized as a structural unit, though in practice it behaves as such. The
613 first group of people with which our Melanesian child will learn to associate himself officially consists of his mother and all her siblings, his mother's mother, if she be living, his own full brothers and sisters, and the children of all the women just mentioned, but not those of the men; in other words, those of his blood relations who are of the same clan, the clan always passing through the mother.

Following the example of Evans-Pritchard (1933, p. 30), I propose to call this group of people a *lineage*.[1] In the Petats dialect the word for it is *piniposa*, in the Kurtatchi dialect *boa*, usually heard
[612] with a suffixed possessive, e.g. *boanē*, my lineage. It must be borne in mind that this term excludes all blood relations on the father's side. For though the child is, throughout his early years and often throughout his life, thrown into close and intimate contact with his father and his father's brothers, sisters, and other relatives, they are regarded as bound to him by ties which might perhaps be called 'personal' rather than 'official'. For this reason, the white man's rule that descendants shall line up behind the father for census or inspection purposes is as puzzling to them as it would

[1] [While Murdock (American Anthropologist, vol. 59, 1957, p. 681) lists the Kurtatchi as having sibs, the definition here would also include lineages in Murdock's sense. – Analyst]

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

551 565 765 has an intimate connexion. Another woman is now called Tchina'-eviat; *eviat* is the word for the bamboo rod used in catching bonito, the connexion being that Sarumpots was engaged in bonito-fishing when the accident occurred. The name of Sobak, my next-door neighbour, means 'to make a grab at', as the shark does at its victim, and commemorates the same catastrophe. In cases of importance the old names seem to be dropped completely. I never succeeded in ascertaining what the names of these people had been before. All inquiries were side-stepped by the answer: 'No one uses it.'

551 As previously explained, these substitute names may be used by relatives who are not permitted to say the individual's personal name. The taboo on the names of certain relatives extends to the use of words which are the same as these names, for which some substitute must be found, either a circumlocution or a word from another dialect.

551 177 These taboos are falling into disuse in consequence of contact with the white man. Most of the people at Petats showed no hesitation in saying the names of their taboo relatives when giving me their genealogies, but at Kurtatchi they either gave me a substitute name or the name of the relationship, or asked some one standing by to say the forbidden word. One man, finding himself alone with me, having occasion to speak of his brother's wife, whose name he should not say, whispered: 'She is my *wagun*, but I'll steal her name and say it quietly.'

[559] The whole system of substituting or changing names is destined to disappear in the near future by reason of the introduction of the Government census. 'Name e stop along paper belong white man, no can loose im.'

SUMMARY

612 613 591 The outstanding characteristics of the structure of this society may be summarized as follows: The kindred, comprising the mother and the father, the siblings of both, and their children, is the unit of which the individual is most aware in relation to the ordinary give-and-take of everyday life. In general, the tie between the individual and his relatives on the mother's side of the house (his lineage) is the stronger, but much depends upon whether the individual is living in the mother's or the father's village. This is to some extent a matter of his parents' choice, but if one individual

1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
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of a married couple is of more importance than the other, the spouse will take up residence in the village of the partner who has the higher status. In any case, the kindred, as defined above, counts for more than the clan.

The recognized social unit is the lineage, its head is the eldest living male, hence it follows that the person to whom an individual looks as the one officially in authority over him is his mother's eldest living brother. Some lineage groups take precedence of the rest; their members are known as *tsunaun*, and the head of such a group is a person of great authority, though now possessing less than in the olden days.

For the reckoning of descent and succession the mother's side of the house is all-important, the father's side completely ignored, i.e. the community is in this respect exclusively matrilineal. But in the case of inheritance of personal property, either in goods or in knowledge, the society is both matrilineal and patrilineal, that is to say, a man can bequeath such property to his son or to his sister's son, or divide it between them, as he pleases.

Throughout the area there are two main clans, but others, smaller in numbers, though not considered as subdivisions, occur: the names and number of these small clans differ in different districts. With each clan is associated some creature, usually, but not always, a bird, but the association now amounts to little more than that of name, though it may once have been more important. The significance of the clan as a social unit seems to have declined considerably with the abolition of warfare.

Marriage is normally exogamous, but exceptions to this rule seem always to have occurred not infrequently. The important thing is to avoid persons with whom direct relationship can be traced either through the mother or through the father, marriages between cousins and the children of cousins being strongly taboo. (This applies to both parallel and cross-cousins.) The bride is preferably obtained from another village.

The relationship system is a 'classificatory' one, comparable with those found in other parts of Melanesia, with strong taboos regulating social intercourse between certain persons. The most important of these are their regulations applying to the wife's mother–daughter's husband relationship, and to that between the parents of husband and the parents of wife. These restrictions are lifted under certain circumstances.